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AUTHOR Torres, Rosalie T.
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ABSTRACT

Colorado's Public School Finance Act of 1988 directed all public school districts to implement state goals for improving achievement, graduation, and attendance rates. Districts and individual schools were required to develop accountability committees involving parents, staff, students, and community members in planning and evaluating school and district programs. Colorado Springs School District Eleven's implementation of the school reform legislation at the district and building levels is described in this paper, which presents a conceptualization of accountability at the building level as influenced by national, state, and central office contexts and implementation efforts. A conclusion is that the implementation process's slow start and limited success were due in part to the incompatibility of accountability activities with conducting "business as usual." Those aspects of "business as usual" that counteract accountability efforts include: (1) impatience with existing commitments; (2) untrained educators for effective implementation; (3) lack of financial support for reform efforts; (4) failure to solicit and apply constituents' input; and (5) a frustrated public. A conclusion is that Colorado's accountability program was well-intentioned but enacted without analysis of districts' and schools' implementation capacities. A recommendation is to set more realistic expectations. One figure is included. (LMI)

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Monday Morning Problems: One District's Implementation of Colorado's Educational Accountability Act

Rosalie T. Torres, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University

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Presentation in the symposium:

Accountability Legislation and School Reform:
Issues and Perspectives from Districts and States

American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting
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Colorado's accountability program is designed to strengthen and improve each local school through team management appropriate to its community. This requires proactive involvement of teachers, staff, principal, parents, and non-parent citizens working together to determine educational needs, goals, and plans for action.

Our mutual goal for all students' success demands that we approach the accountability process with open, honest questioning of programs and practices as to their contribution to that goal. No matter how much progress has been made so far, no matter how hard all have worked, there is an urgency to forge ahead. The national goals, labor market crisis, and sense of public concern all contribute to this urgency.

It is my pledge that the Colorado Department of Education will focus on cooperative efforts and will work with all segments of the community to achieve our State Goals.

William T. Randall,
Commissioner of Education
State of Colorado
September, 1990

Introduction

Recent legislation in Colorado (the Public School Finance Act of 1988) directed all public school districts to implement state goals for improving achievement, and graduation and attendance rates. In so doing, districts and individual schools must have accountability committees which involve parents, school and district staff, students, and community members in assessing needs, planning, monitoring, evaluating, and reporting of school and district programs.

This presentation addresses Colorado Springs School District Eleven's implementation of this school reform legislation at the district and building levels. It presents a conceptualization of

implementation of accountability at the building level as influenced by national, state, and central office contexts and efforts with respect to accountability. The paper concludes with an analysis of the impact of this legislation and the likelihood of success in the future.

What is presented here is a retrospective analysis conducted on the basis of my experience as an administrative staff member in District Eleven's Department of Planning, Evaluation, and Measurement (DPEM) for two and one-half years, from August 1988 through December 1990. During that time I shared responsibility for implementation of Colorado's accountability act at both district and building levels. Specifically, I developed guidelines, procedures, and materials for implementing district and building accountability processes; conducted training sessions for principals, central office staff, parents, and community members; and provided consultations with individual principals and building committees on developing opinion surveys, conducting needs assessments, and writing school improvement plans.

To provide the reader further perspective on my analysis I have conceptualized implementation of accountability at the district and building levels as influenced by national and state contexts and implementation efforts (see Figure 1). In this scheme context includes intra- and extra-organizational factors: the political, economic, historical, and physical aspects of an organization. Contexts are important because they not only provide a means through which participants in organizations interact, they

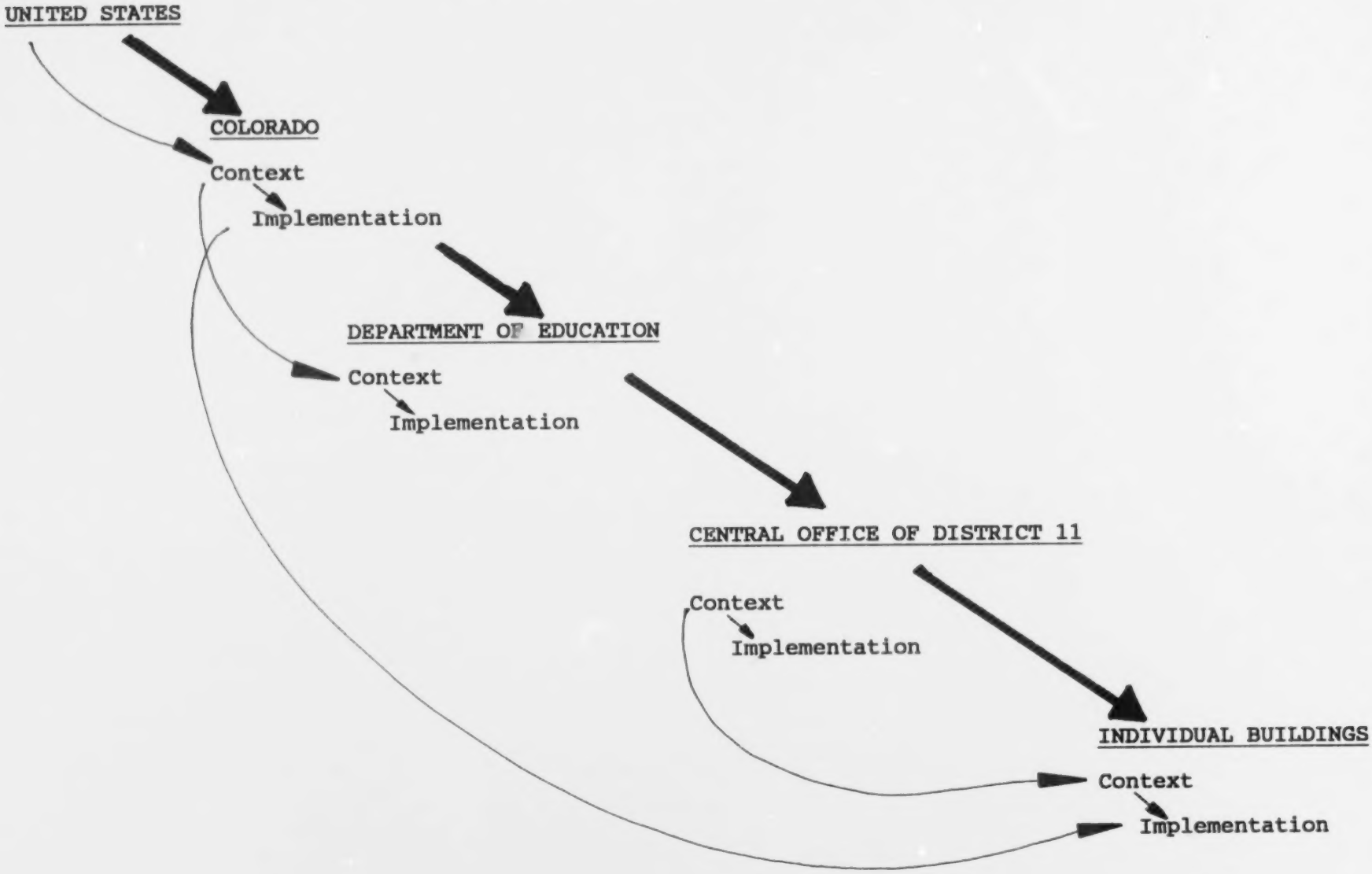

Figure 1. National, State, and Central Office Influences on the Implementation of Accountability at the Building Level

also determine organizational processes (Torres, 1991). The processes of interest here are the conceptualization and implementation of accountability. Thus, Colorado has been influenced by the national climate of educational reform. Further, the context of the state government of Colorado at least in part determines how educational reform is implemented by the legislature (see Figure 1, top left).

Colorado's accountability legislation (Part 2 of the Public School Finance Act of 1988) is administered by an elected State Board of Education through the Commissioner of Education, appointed by the Board. Under the Commissioner's direction Colorado's Department of Education (CDE) is responsible for the administration of the accountability program.

CDE interacts with local districts regarding accountability in four main ways: (a) by providing guidelines for the implementation of accountability, (b) by receiving and reviewing each district's accountability documentation (i.e., improvement plans and achievement reports), (c) by conducting accreditation audits which review each district's compliance with accountability legislation, and (d) sponsoring an annual state accountability conference. How these activities are carried out is impacted by the context of the state department of education.

In turn, how accountability is administered at the district level is determined by the context of the district. In Colorado Springs School District Eleven the Department of Planning, Evaluation, and Measurement (DPEM) serves as liaison to the

district accountability committee and provides guidelines and directives for the implementation of accountability within individual school buildings. The individual schools are in the same relationship to the district's central office and the Department of Planning, Evaluation and Measurement (DPEM) in particular, as the district is to CDE. Overall, DPEM has responsibility for assuring the district's compliance with accountability legislation as does CDE for assuring the districts' compliance.

Finally, implementation of accountability within individual buildings is determined by the context of the central office and its implementation of accountability as well as by the context of individual buildings (see Figure 1, lower right half).

My description and analysis of the contexts and implementation of accountability at these various levels is limited by my exposure to them. That is, it covers (a) Colorado implementation (the actual legislation), but not Colorado context; (b) Colorado Department of Education implementation in part, but not CDE context; (c) both District Eleven's central office context and implementation; and (d) part of the context and implementation of individual school buildings. Put another way, I know the most about and can reflect upon the district's context and implementation; I know the least about the contexts of the state of Colorado and the Department of Education; I know some things about the context and implementation of individual buildings.

Colorado

Implementation

The Colorado Public School Finance Act of 1988 (Part 2) contains the specifics of the state's accountability program (House Bill 1341). This section on implementation at the state level will describe the accountability requirements. The first four subsections below detail the requirements as presented in the CDE Accreditation Review Guide for School Districts. The requirements are summarized as presented in this guide in the following areas: (a) school building accountability program and planning process, (b) district accountability program and planning process, (c) school reporting requirements, and (d) district reporting requirements. Without presenting the contents of the guide in its entirety, as much of its actual wording as possible has been maintained in this summary in order to give the reader a reasonable sense of the legislation's language and intent.

The remaining seven subsections further describe Colorado's accountability programs in terms of its (a) short time line for implementation, (b) requirement that districts solicit and assure community participation, (c) requirement that school personnel and lay persons understand and use complex planning and evaluation procedures, (d) focus on one-year plans, (e) unclear sanctions for non-compliance, (f) top-down requirement of a bottom-up process, and (g) lack of specificity.

School building accountability program and planning process. Each school must have functioning accountability committees which consist of a broad representation of the school community. The committees must have a goal of balancing their memberships to be consistent with the racial/ethnic representation of the school attendance area. The committees must (a) elect a chairperson, (b) establish a schedule of meetings, (c) adopt bylaws, (d) develop and review areas of study annually, and (e) communicate their activities and progress to the district accountability committee and the board of education.

The principal must cooperatively develop an annual school improvement plan with the involvement of the building committee no later than September 1 of each school year. The plan must address the three state goal areas of attendance, achievement, and graduation rate. The process of developing the school improvement plan includes, but is not limited to the assessment of school profile information which includes (a) strengths and needs related to services, educational programs, and student performance; (b) results from opinion surveys of students, former students, staff and community members representative of the different racial/ethnic populations within each school attendance area; (c) findings from research on effective educational practices; and (d) student achievement results separated by racial/ethnic and gender populations. Assessment results are to be translated into needs statements from which goals and objectives are identified for the school improvement plan. The principal must include staff,

students, and other community members in the accountability and planning process. Succeeding school improvement plans must show evidence of progress toward the mission of the school.

District accountability program and planning process. Similar processes must take place at the district level. The local board of education must adopt a plan for a local accountability program to measure the adequacy and efficiency of the district's educational programs. This plan must (a) include an ongoing school improvement process, (b) specify how the district intends to measure educational achievement in its schools, (c) provide for the measurement of graduation rates, and (d) contain implementation procedures included in the budget.

Further, the board of education must appoint a district accountability committee which makes recommendations to the board relative to the accountability program. The district committee must consist of at least one parent, one teacher, one school administrator, and a taxpayer from the district. It must have a goal of balancing its membership to be consistent with the racial/ethnic make-up of the district. The district committee must (a) elect a chairperson, (b) establish a schedule of meetings, (c) adopt bylaws, (d) develop and review areas of study annually, and (e) review individual school improvement plans. The district superintendent or superintendent's designee serves as a resource person to the district committee.

The board of education must adopt general organizational guidelines for the district and building committees to follow.

These guidelines must address reporting requirements and public notice of meetings.

Finally, as similarly required at the building level, the board must adopt a district improvement plan and submit it to the State Board of Education by October 1 of each year. Prior to adoption of this plan, the board must consult with the district accountability committee and review their recommendations.

School reporting requirements. By September 1 of each year each school must report the results of its school improvement plan to the local board of education. In addition, by December 31 of each year a written annual school report is to be provided to the school's staff, students, parents, and community. It is to include results of the school improvement plan and student achievement results from norm referenced tests for all racial/ethnic and gender groups.

District reporting requirements. The local board of education, with the advice of the district accountability committee must assess parent, staff, student and community needs and desires for information about the district at least once every five years.

By October 1 of each year the district must report the results of its annual improvement plan to the State Board of Education. By December 31 of each year the district must also report to all staff, parents, students, as well as to residents without school age children. This report to the public must include (a) district goals and long-range plans; (b) results of the district improvement plan; (c) information about the district accountability committee

and its accomplishments; (d) student achievement results of college entrance and norm-referenced tests for all racial/ethnic and gender groups; (e) student dropout and graduation rates; (f) revenues, expenditures, costs of various segments of district/school operations, and costs of programs for improvement; and (g) results from the Colorado Student Assessment Program if applicable.

Short time line for implementation. Colorado's accountability legislation was enacted in the spring of 1988 and required implementation to begin that fall. The first school improvement plans were due on June 15, 1989. The first district improvement plans were due on October 1, 1989.

Districts solicit and assure community participation. The legislation requires that districts and schools both solicit and assure community participation. Although descriptive materials about accountability provided to the community clearly state that their role is advisory, sometimes individuals approach their involvement with accountability from an adversarial position. Some are dissatisfied with the service provided to their child(ren) and see involvement in accountability as a way to effect desired changes. Although not explicitly stated, no doubt legislators--constituents of the educational system, themselves--meant for community members to increase educators' accountability by raising issues and concerns, sometimes uncomfortable for educators. Principals, district administrators, and board members routinely negotiate with dissatisfied community members, parents in particular. While no educator would claim such negotiations to be

inappropriate, more often than not they do increase the complexity of the educators' task. This legislation requires that educators systematically incorporate that complexity into the basic operations of districts and buildings. Again, while many would argue that the requirement is fitting for the effective delivery of education, the fact that educators themselves are unlikely, at least initially, to welcome it should be recognized.

School personnel and lay persons must understand and use complex planning and evaluation activities. To be implemented as it was intended, this accountability legislation requires that both school personnel and lay persons understand and use complex planning and evaluation activities. To demonstrate progress toward goals, outcome objectives must be measurable. While the specification of measurable outcome objectives may seem to be an appropriate and reasonable requirement on the surface, it necessitates: first, that educators understand what constitutes a measurable outcome objective; and second, that baseline data be available from which to project an appropriate level of gain or improvement. Further, in many cases the data must be disaggregated by racial/ethnic and gender groups.

One-year plans. District and school improvement plans must be written and submitted annually. No mention is given of how schools might address what they consider to be appropriate longer term plans for achieving student outcomes.

Unclear sanctions for non-compliance. Neither the legislation or guidelines from the Colorado Department of Education specified sanctions for not complying with the new accountability requirements. Districts and schools were left to speculate about similar legislation in other states and to assume that accountability would continue to be a part of Colorado's accreditation program. Under this program accreditation compliance audits are conducted every three years. In the past districts were visited by a review team and received written notice of any areas of non-compliance. Districts were then required to submit a plan for remediating those areas, and later to report on the results of that plan.

Top-down requirement for a bottom-up process. Colorado's accountability legislation can be viewed as a top-down requirement for a bottom-up process. Indeed, legislators themselves referred to it as a "grass roots" process for the improvement of education. The following excerpt from a pamphlet titled, "1989 Colorado State Board of Education Goals: Strategies for Excellence" captures some of the spirit of this notion:

> Part 2 of the School Finance Act of 1988 mandates new requirements for accountability of the long-range planning for educational improvement which involves the total community. The legislation is unique in that it provides each local Board of Education, in cooperation with the District Accountability Committee, the flexibility to individually adopt goals that will fulfill not only local needs, but statewide goals designed to enhance Colorado's educational endeavors. (Colorado Department of Education, 1989)

Accountability as a locally-derived, but mandated process to improve education contains within it a fundamental incongruity.

What is now conventional wisdom tells us that individuals and groups are most likely to implement successfully and benefit by self-improvement efforts which they themselves have designed.

Lack of specificity. While the legislation requires that certain processes take place as described above, it does not detail how to conduct these processes. In fact, the legislation specifically requires that local boards of education adopt organizational guidelines for the districts and schools to follow. Legislators may have specifically meant to provide latitude in the specification of procedures in an effort to further empower local districts and schools.

Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Implementation

At least one aspects of CDE's role in implementation, continuing changes, was evidenced at the district level. As discussed above, Colorado's accountability legislation does not detail specific procedures for its implementation on the local level. Rather, implementation procedures are to be developed and adopted by each board of education. However, this articulation, at it turned out, was not to take place without the assistance of CDE, who has on a continual basis disseminated more specific details about procedures, such as formats for the annual district achievement report, changes in reporting dates, and the results of ongoing accreditation reviews statewide. Further details are communicated verbally through consultations with the district's CDE field services representative. CDE also publishes handbooks

annually explaining the accountability process.

The piecemeal imparting of this information suggests that the processes themselves had not been fully conceptualized, no doubt a result of the short timeline for implementation of the legislation described on page 10. While legislators may have meant to provide an important degree of local control, increasingly CDE interprets more of the legislation and imposes its interpretation on local districts in the form of rules and guidelines.

Moreover, these interpretations are in flux. In the 1989 Handbook for Colorado Educational Accountability school profiles are explained as "assessment information...compiled into an understandable snapshot of the school used to measure and report progress toward achievement of the school's educational goals" (p. 6). Basic elements of a school profile are to include indicators of student outcomes, indicators of student behavior, effective instructional practices, school climate, indicators of community and parent information, and attitudes and perceptions.

In the 1990 Handbook for Colorado Educational Accountability the term profile is not used in the description of needs assessment information to be collected and analyzed by schools. Rather, it appears in a discussion of student performance assessment:

> In meeting the legal requirements for measurable goals expected by Colorado's accountability program, schools develop a profile of current student performance to provide a point of reference for their school improvement goals and plans.
>
> The most accountable school student performance profiles summarize collective classroom profiles provided

> by teachers. The classroom profile is based on teacher judgement related to the performance of a student or group of students. (p. 11)

Although both useful in the needs assessment process, the 1989 interpretation of profile is clearly broader than the 1990 interpretation. The differences in these interpretations create confusion about where and how districts and schools should focus their data collection efforts.

Central Office of District Eleven

Context

Size. Colorado Springs School District Eleven serves approximately 30,000 students in 53 schools. Of these schools, five are high schools, nine are junior high schools, 38 are elementary schools, and one is an alternative high school.

Recent reorganization. In the spring of 1988 District Eleven's central office underwent a major reorganization involving a significant turnover in departmental administrators. The reorganization involved the expansion of DPEM from one to four professional staff, two of whom (including myself) were new to Colorado.

Turnover in the superintendency. This reorganization was in large part precipitated by the arrival of a new superintendent in 1987. At that time the district had had eight superintendents in ten years.

Ongoing fiscal concerns. Throughout the past three years District Eleven has had ongoing fiscal concerns. They included a reduction of revenues from the state, two failed tax-limitation propositions which would have cut funds for education, and a failed mill-levy increase. In all, these concerns drained the district's energy, particularly among central office staff, in repeated fights for economic survival.

Negative history of accountability. In the years prior to 1988 accountability had something of a negative connotation for the central office as the district accountability committee under the leadership of a parent-chairperson was heavily involved in all aspects of the district's accreditation review audit. In addition to auditing compliance with accountability requirements, this review covers areas such as attendance; hours of operation; duties of the superintendent; qualifications of administrators instructional, and support staff; transportation; and school food services. Thus the district accountability committee had a more comprehensive role with respect to district operations than may have been intended. This expanded role created some anxiety and frustration among central office staff and board members.

Implementation

All of the foregoing factors--the nature of the accountability process itself, how it is being handled by CDE, and the context of the district--have determined how accountability is implemented at the district level.

Invite but do not use input. As explained earlier (see page 10) districts must both solicit and assure community participation. Community members are invited to participate in school improvement planning processes. Rightly so, they have some expectation that their input will be used in these processes. Often, however, members of the district accountability committee have expressed frustration that their input is not used. In effect, the district must ask for input about decision areas which it is not ready necessarily ready to make changes in--at least not on the basis of committee members' input.

Lack of full central office participation. While accountability is designed to positively impact student outcomes, specifically achievement, graduation rate, and attendance, it has been given only limited attention by the central administration outside of DPEM. That is, the superintendent, the Board of Education, and the Department of Instruction have been only nominally involved in accountability, and often only at the behest of DPEM and the district accountability committee. This circumstance is, in part, due to the negative history of accountability in the district as well as its environment of constant change and competing priorities. Others in the central office may well view accountability as being "taken care of" by DPEM, and one less thing that they have to worry about. However, disjunctions occur at several levels as a result: (a) the executive directors of school management do not review or use the school improvement plans in their monitoring of activity at the building

level, (b) the board of education has only recently begun to become aware of the activities of the district accountability committee, and (c) the board of education does not fully understand the role of school improvement plans in the development of the district improvement plan and the role of accountability in the setting of district goals.

Substantial time to interpret. In District Eleven the lack of specificity of the accountability legislation caused some degree of anxiety as we struggled to put processes in place within a relatively short period of time. That is, substantial time and consideration was devoted to interpreting the accountability requirements and preparing directives and materials for use at the building level. Given the limited time to conduct this task, this latitude in interpretation was not viewed as empowering, but rather demanding of resources in a central office environment strained by turnover and budgetary concerns.

Limited training/direction provided. As a result of the substantial time and effort required to develop procedures and materials for implementation at the building level, only limited training and direction was provided. While accountability consumed a substantial part of DPEM's personnel resources, we were always sharply aware of how much more direction and help buildings needed to implement accountability as it was intended.

Unclear sanctions for noncompliance. At the district level no clear sanctions for buildings' noncompliance were developed. DPEM was reluctant to operate in too heavy-handed a manner with

buildings for fear that they would wholesalely reject or sabotage the integrity of accountability processes within their buildings. Whether or not a more directed approach would have worked remains unclear. Of continuing concern is DPEM's mission to provide service to buildings in other planning and evaluation efforts, and to maintain a position of credibility with building personnel.

No short-term benefits. At the district level improvement efforts were focused on establishing baseline data in the areas of attendance and graduation rate, particularly. As a result, the short-term benefits of seeing accurately measured progress were not available to reinforce administrators' or the boards' motivation and enthusiasm about accountability processes.

Compliance rather than ownership. In all, the factors just discussed, both the district's context and its efforts to implement accountability contributed to a position of compliance with the legislation rather than ownership of the processes. This position was not one of decision or intent. The circumstances are easily related to the work of Hall, Loucks, Rutherford, and Newlove (1975) describing the levels of use of an innovation. Viewing accountability as an innovation, District Eleven's level of use is clearly at the mechanical stage (level III of six levels). Hall et al. explain it as focused on:

> Discuss[ion of] management and logistical issues related to the use of the innovation....Plan[ning] for immediate ongoing use...with a short-term perspective....[and] often lack[ing] anticipation of immediate consequences. (p. 55)

Individual Buildings

Context

All levels of socio-economic status. District Eleven's 53 schools serve approximately 30,000 students in a metropolitan area of approximately 300,000. The students come from families of a wide variety of socio-economic levels.

Autonomy. Among District Eleven's 53 schools there is a posture of independence from the central office. This attitude has developed among principals in response to both the turnover in superintendents over the past ten years and the recent reorganization. Regardless of changes taking place "downtown" and any uncertainty or instability those changes caused, principals' responsibility for "keeping school" did not waiver. Often when answers to their inquiries about district and school operations were not forthcoming, they had to make decisions independently and carry them out. The more principals did this successfully, the more independent they became.

Perception of insensitivity to building concerns. This posture of independence was further developed by principals' perception of insensitivity on the part of the central office to their concerns. In my tenure this perception focused primarily around issues such as short notice for mandatory meetings, time-consuming requests for documentation, and compliance with bureaucratic and meaningless procedures--accountability included.

Implementation

All of the foregoing factors, now including the context of the buildings, have determined how accountability is implemented at the building level.

Limited community participation. Among those aspects of accountability about which principals most freely expressed frustration was the difficulty of getting parents to serve on the building committee. This problem was most frequently cited by principals of schools with the largest populations of students on free-and-reduced lunch. As described on page 11, in order to implement accountability, school personnel as well as lay persons must understand and use complex planning and evaluation activities. I found that many school administrators did not readily understand the role of accountability in their schools, how to develop technically sound opinion surveys, or how to write measurable outcome objectives. Yet, these are all processes parents and community members would have to understand to become meaningfully involved in the accountability process. Principals' success at soliciting community participation would be further hampered by their ability to articulate clearly the community members' role. DPEM's provision of only limited training and direction contributed to this situation.

Limited use of central office resources. Individual schools made limited use of consultative resources available through DPEM for facilitating accountability processes in their buildings. At general leadership meetings (staff meetings of all central office

administrators and principals), cluster meetings (meetings of Department of Instruction administrators, others from the central office and principals from one of five groups of schools), and in informal exchanges, principals were routinely invited to call DPEM for help in orienting their building accountability committees, conducting needs assessments, developing opinion surveys, and developing their school improvement plans. Schools made few requests for help other than in developing opinion surveys. While it is certainly true that DPEM staff would have been strained to provide help to all schools as offered, we were surprised that fewer schools did not request help.

Sometimes principals did call for clarification regarding operation of their building accountability committees or to request training materials for orienting their committees. More often than not, at these times I offered to attend a building accountability committee meeting to help in the orientation and answer questions. More often than not, my offer was declined. I sensed that principals were hesitant to expose their committees to all that the committees might know about the accountability process as it was intended to be implemented. Many building committees were not involved in the full extent of activities specified in the legislation. Principals tended to direct the committee's attention to conducting parent opinion surveys, often to the exclusion of other activities such as review of additional needs assessment data and the development of the school improvement plan.

Technically flawed school improvement plans. As a result of principals' lack of understanding of accountability, and in particular of how to write measurable outcome objectives, the majority of school improvement plans submitted in 1989 and 1990 were technically unsound. They focused on the implementation of activities to the exclusion of evaluation components specifying measures to assess changes in student, teacher, or parent outcomes the activities were designed to effect. This result was in part due to the short lead time for implementation afforded by the legislation, and the district's inability to provide more training on these topics.

Non-essential school improvement plans. While addressing graduation rate/high risk, attendance, and achievement, school improvement plans represented only a sampling of the school's efforts to educate students. It is not clear that this sampling corresponded with what the schools believed to be their most essential efforts. When conducting training sessions and discussing with principals the state's requirement that they report to their publics annual progress toward these three goal areas, it became apparent that they wanted to include much more information about what was happening at the school than this progress report would contain.

Frustration and further alienation. Although it was not comfortable for me to acknowledge this circumstance, I could not help but observe that despite our best efforts the accountability requirements were contributing to principals' frustration and

further alienation from the central office.

The time required for the district to interpret accountability legislation and develop support materials for schools, in turn, resulted in even shorter time frames for buildings to be in compliance with the law. Often schools received materials only weeks before they were to have used them with their staff and accountability committees. They did not always readily understand the materials presented, perhaps in some cases because at this point they did not want to, and in other cases because insufficient explanations and examples were given.

Compliance rather than ownership. In the main, as at the district level, and not because any one person or group intended that it be so, the buildings' position with accountability has also been one of compliance with the law rather than ownership of the process. The nature of the accountability process itself, its implementation at the state and district levels, and the contexts of the district and the buildings cumulatively contribute to this posture.

Discussion

While this analysis is critical, it is not intended to present a completely negative situation. No doubt, the reader is wondering, Have there been any successes? Has there been any progress at all? The answer is yes. Over time, more and more principals, more and more central office administrators, and more and more building accountability committee members are coming to

understand the accountability process and requirements. As DPEM is able to provide continuing training and consultation, needs assessment activities and school improvement plans more accurately reflect what the legislature and CDE intended.

In its present form the accountability process requires significant energy from all levels: the state department of education, the district's central office, and the individual buildings. At this point it is unclear that this energy is not being expended in compliance efforts which lack meaning. Are, then, the accountability requirements defeating the purposes they are intended to serve? Are they dissipating already tight resources in education nonproductively?

To those who may argue that our history with accountability is short and that must not expect too much too soon, I respectfully ask: Can we as Americans and as educators, be persistent enough in the face of limited and only painstakingly achieved progress in this reform effort continue to support it with no guarantee of success? Our track record for sticking with what does not appear to be working quickly enough does not suggest that we can. We tend to tire easily and seek the energization of a new solution.

If we were not to seek a new solution so quickly, what can we say further about our present experience? On the face of it, the accountability process is not ill-conceived. It basically asks us to assess where we are, set realistic goals for improvement, develop a plan to achieve those goals, implement the plan, and report on our progress. Do schools need to be more accountable in

this way? Most would agree, yes they do.

In Colorado and in School District Eleven, the slow start described in this paper cannot be attributed to ignorance or bad intent. The issues addressed here are clearly ones of implementation. Our limited successes are the fault of no one group. I will close this discussion on the following question: Can we engage in the activities necessary to demonstrate accountability while otherwise conducting business-as-usual? My answer is a resounding No! Those aspects of business-as-usual which counteract efforts to be accountable include the following:

1. A society which is consumed with doing more in new and better way, rather than attending to and reflecting on and improving what we have already made commitments to;

2. Educators who are not oriented to student outcomes or trained to continuously monitor and improve programs to achieve those outcomes on the basis of what more studied consideration of their working knowledge about effective implementation can tell them;

3. Educational systems which require but do not financially support reform efforts;

4. Educational systems which do not know how to effectively solicit and use input from their constituency--parents and community members; and

5. A public frustrated with and unwilling to support public education.

I, and certainly no single person has the solutions to these pervasive and systemic problems. What we can do as we work toward solving them, is to be more realistic about what it is possible to expect of ourselves in the face of them. For District Eleven,

Colorado's accountability program is well-intentioned, but reflective of other now familiar experiences in education. It has been enacted without incisive analysis of districts' and schools' capacity to implement it successfully. As legislators and educators, our long standing experience should tell us that new programs, efforts, and initiatives should not be undertaken without a thorough analysis of and accounting for existing conditions likely to defeat them. We have been around this block not once, but many, too many times already.

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